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ABSTRACT

The "National Education Goals Report: Building A Nation of Learners, 1993" provides the most current information on where U.S. schools stand in regard to achieving the National Education Goals. Some of the key findings of the report are summarized in this digest. The six goals pertain to school readiness; high school completion; student achievement and citizenship; science and mathematics; adult literacy and lifelong learning; and safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools. Positive findings indicate a slight decline in student victimization and use of alcohol and other drugs among 12th-graders and an increase in mathematics and science achievement. However, the report shows a stagnation or decline in other areas, such as the high school completion rate and adult literacy. In addition, significant achievement gaps and differences in student, parental, and worker attitudes exist between the U.S. and other industrialized nations. Overall, the report shows how far the U.S. has come in reaching its educational goals. This awareness can provide the motivation to change. (LMI)

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Understanding the National Education Goals

ERIC Digest

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Understanding the National Education Goals

by Laurie E. Gronlund

How Were the National Education Goals Established?

The National Education Goals create clear, concise targets for educational improvement relevant to all Americans from early childhood through adulthood. The process of implementing these Goals has included three steps. In September 1989, then-President Bush and the 50 state governors held an Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. The outcome was the creation of a framework for action called the National Education Goals. Adopted in 1990, the Goals state that by the year 2000:

- All children in America will start school ready to learn.
- The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.
- American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.
- U. S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.
- Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
- Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

A bipartisan National Education Goals Panel of governors, senior national administration officials, and congressional representatives was created to monitor the Nation's progress towards the Goals and to report their findings annually to the American people. Lastly, the Panel proposed to establish a National Education Standards and Assessments Council to develop criteria for voluntary certification of national and state content and performance standards and assessment systems. The Council's final form and duties, however, are still being determined through deliberations in Congress.

Why National Educational Goals?

The purpose of establishing the Goals is twofold: first, to increase the achievement level of all students, and second, to provide equal opportunity education for all students. The decisions about what to teach our students have been, for the most part, based on standardized multiple-choice tests and mass-market textbooks. This approach has been criticized by many educators as focusing on low-level skills rather than on the ability to solve problems and actually apply learning to real-world situations. Setting goals and high, world-class standards on what students should know and be able to do will increase the expectations that educators have of their students and will let everyone know specifically what all students should be learning.

A Federal Commitment to the Goals

In May 1993, the **Goals 2000: Educate America Act**, backed by President Clinton and Secretary of Education Richard Riley, was sent to Congress. This bill acknowledges the rights of all children to an "opportunity to learn," to well-trained teachers, and to a solid curriculum. The bill's objectives include the following: (1) developing new state and local partnerships; (2) coordinating communication between states and communities; (3) expanding outreach in rural, suburban, and urban areas to encourage the forming of new coalitions; (4) improving the federal government's communication with communities through such means as the monthly Satellite Town Meeting, 1–800/USA–LEARN hotline, and regional conferences; and (5) increasing technical assistance to help individual communities locate the information and resources they need to help them achieve the Goals. Additionally, a GOALS 2000 Clearinghouse was created to assist communities seeking help with specific problems or issues. You may write to the GOALS 2000 Clearinghouse at the U.S. Department of Education, Room 2089, 400 Maryland Avenue SW, Washington, DC, 20202.

Where Does Our Nation Stand Now?

The *National Education Goals Report: Building A Nation of Learners, 1993* provides the most current information on where our nation's schools stand in regard to achieving the Goals and what progress has been made since the Goals were established. Some of the key findings reported in the *Goals Report, 1993* are summarized in this Digest. Also included are some of the findings from the *Goals Report, 1992* that were not updated in the *Goals Report, 1993*. To obtain a copy of the *Goals Report*, contact the National Education Goals Panel, 1850 M Street NW, Suite 270, Washington, DC 20036; 202/632–0952.

International Comparisons

International education comparisons can be as beneficial as international comparisons in other fields such as health or economics. By learning about the educational performance, teaching methods, and policies of others, we can gain insight into the level of performance we need to strive for and the types of education reforms that may help us (or not help us) to achieve higher performance. Among the international comparisons reported in the *Goals Report, 1992* are the following:

- *Lower Parent Expectations:* Parents in Minneapolis reported that they were very satisfied when their fifth-grade children performed at the 60th percentile compared to other children in their city. Parents in Taiwan and Japanese

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cities reported that they were not very satisfied with their children unless they scored at or near the 80th percentile.

- *Lower Worker Expectations:* American workers were much less likely than West German and Japanese workers to report that they should be expected to think up better ways to do their job or anticipate a need to upgrade their current job skills.

- *Diminishing Lead in High School Completion Rates:* In the past, the United States consistently led other countries in high school and college completion rates. Currently, however, both Germany and Japan have higher secondary school completion rates for young adults, ages 25 to 34.

Status on the National Education Goals

The information below represents part of America's report card in relation to achieving the National Education Goals. The data represent only a small portion of the findings in the *Goals Reports* and were chosen because of their importance to educators and their relevance to the Goal's objectives. The National Center for Education Statistics is the original source from which the data were drawn.

Goal 1: Readiness for School

By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

Parent and Teacher Perceptions of School Readiness

- Both teachers and parents rated children's ability to communicate their needs, wants, and thoughts verbally and to approach new activities with enthusiasm as very important for school readiness. Teachers and parents disagree, however, on the importance of knowing the alphabet and counting to 20, with 58 to 59 percent of the parents believing these abilities to be important and only 7 to 10 percent of the teachers stating that these skills are important for children to possess before entering kindergarten.

Preschool Program Enrollments

- Preschool enrollment almost doubled between 1973 and 1992; however, for 3- to 5-year old children from low-income families the enrollment rate in 1992 was only 27 percent, compared to 34 percent of children from middle-income families, and 55 percent of children from high-income families.

- In 1993, 56 percent of all 3- to 5-year old children with disabilities were enrolled in preschool; however, this percentage dropped to 51 percent for children with disabilities whose family incomes were $30,000 or less.

Family Involvement with Children

- Of all 3- to 5-year old children in 1993, nearly nine out of ten children (88 percent) were involved in chores or brought along on errands by their parents or family members in the previous month, while only 42 percent were taken to a play, concert, live show, art gallery, museum, historical site, zoo, or aquarium, and only 38 percent were taken to a library one or more times in the previous month.

Child Health and Nutrition

- In 1993, 87 percent of all preschool-aged children had visited a doctor in the last year for routine health care; about half (52 percent) visited a dentist.

- In 1986, 99 percent of all preschool children received the minimum recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of protein in their diets. However, only eight out of ten received the minimum RDA of vitamins A and C, only half received the minimum RDA of calcium, and only one-fourth received the minimum RDA of iron.

Goal 2: High School Completion

By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

Dropout Rates

- In 1992, the percentage of young people between 16 and 24 without a high school diploma was 29 percent for Hispanic youth, 14 percent for African American youth, and 8 percent for White youth.

- High school completion rates improved between 1975 and 1992 for African American students by 10 percent and for White students by 5 percent; Hispanic students, unfortunately, consistently have completion rates much lower than other groups and actually dropped by 1 percent between 1975 and 1992. The improvement among African American and White students was made in the early 1980s and has remained steady since then.

Reasons for Dropping Out

- The primary reasons cited by dropouts in 1992 for leaving school were (1) not liking school, (2) failing school, and (3) feeling unable to keep up with schoolwork.

Dropouts Who Returned to High School

- Almost half (48 percent) of the 1980 sophomores who dropped out of school returned and completed high school by 1986.

Reasons for Returning to High School

- In 1990, dropouts who reported that they were somewhat or very likely to return to school stated that they would return if they were (1) sure that they could obtain a good job after graduation and (2) certain of graduation. Almost 50 percent of these dropouts reported that they would return if they could attend night or weekend classes or if they could get tutoring.

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Goal 3: Student Achievement and Citizenship

By the year 2000, American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy.

Competency in Math and Reading

- Between 1990 and 1992, the percentage of twelfth-graders who met the Goals Panel's performance standard in mathematics increased slightly across all ethnic groups.

- In 1992, 18 percent of all fourth-graders, 25 percent of all eighth-graders, and 16 percent of all twelfth-graders had met the Goals Panel's performance standards in mathematics.

- The percentage of students meeting the Goals Panel's standards in reading, in 1992, was 25 percent of all fourth-graders, 28 percent of all eighth-graders, and 37 percent of all twelfth-graders.

Trends in Science Achievement

- Between 1970 and 1990, fourth-grade students' average score of proficiency in science remained at Level 200—the understanding of simple scientific principles; however, their average score did increase by nine points.

- Eighth-grade students' average score of proficiency in science between 1970 and 1990 increased from Level 200 to Level 250—the ability to apply basic scientific information.

- Twelfth-grade students' average score of proficiency in science between 1970 and 1990 remained at Level 250.

Advanced Placement Results in the Core Subjects of English, Mathematics, Science, and History

- The number of students taking the Advanced Placement examinations in the core subjects between 1986 and 1992 increased by 63 percent, with the highest rate of increase among minority groups.

- Of those eleventh- and twelfth-graders who took the advanced placement examinations in 1993 (85 out of every 1000 eleventh- and twelfth-graders) almost two-thirds scored high enough to make them eligible for college credit.

Civics Education

- In 1988, 99 percent of all twelfth-graders understood the basics of civics, such as elections, laws, and constitutional rights. Only 49 percent understood the specific government structures and functions, and only 6 percent understood the structures within the different branches of government, such as the Cabinet and the judiciary.

Community Service

- In 1992, only 44 percent of all twelfth-graders reported that they had performed community service during the past two years. Of those students performing community service, there were more female than male students, more Asian students than students of other ethnic groups, and more Catholic high school students than public or other private high school students.

Goal 4: Science and Mathematics

By the year 2000, U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement.

Instructional Practices

- In 1990, of all the eighth-grade science teachers surveyed about their weekly class activities, only 62 percent reported that they did science experiments, 10 percent used computers, and 14 percent assigned oral or written reports. Only about half (56 percent) of the teachers felt that their laboratory science facilities were adequate, 56 percent felt that they were well-supplied with instructional materials, and 46 percent did not base what they taught their students on textbooks.

- Of the eighth-grade math teachers surveyed in 1992 about their weekly class activities, 51 percent had their students work in small groups, 49 percent place a strong emphases on developing the ability to solve unique problems, and 56 percent report that their students use calculators in their class at least once a week.

Student Attitudes Toward Science and Math

- The number of fourth-grade students reporting that they like math and science is much greater than the number of eighth- and twelfth-grade students. The decline in attitude towards math is greater between the fourth- and twelfth-grade girls' attitudes than between the fourth- and twelfth-grade boys' attitudes.

- The percentages of girls responding with "yes" to the question, "Do you like science?" were 78 percent of the fourth-grade girls, 64 percent of the eighth-grade girls, and 57 percent of the twelfth-grade girls.

- The percentages of boys responding with "yes" to the question, "Do you like science?" were 81 percent of the fourth-grade boys, 72 percent of eighth-grade boys, and 74 percent of the twelfth-grade boys.

- In 1992, the percentages of girls responding with "agree" or "strongly agree" to the statement, "I like math" were 71 percent of the fourth-grade girls, 55 percent of the eighth-grade girls, and 49 percent of the twelfth-grade girls.

- The percentages of boys responding with "agree" or "strongly agree" to the statement, "I like math" were 71 percent of the fourth-grade boys, 59 percent of the eighth-grade boys, and 53 percent of the twelfth-grade boys.

Goal 5: Adult Literacy and Lifelong Learning

By the year 2000, every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Adult Literacy

- Based on 1992 test results of adult literacy, almost half of all American adults do not perform at the level of literacy considered by the National Education Goals Panel to be important for competing successfully in a global economy and for exercising the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Participation in Adult Education and Worker Training

- During the 1990–91 school year, about one-third (34 percent) of all adults were enrolled in adult education courses (this does not include adults enrolled in full-time programs). The largest percentage of these adults were between 17 and 34 years old, with the 35 to 54 age range a close second.

- The percentage of workers participating in training to improve their current job skills rose from 35 percent in 1983 to 41 percent in 1991.

Barriers to Adult Education

- Almost two-thirds of the adults surveyed believed that barriers kept them from participating in adult education during the 1990–91 school year.

- The most frequently cited barrier to education for these adults was their work schedule (33 percent), with class cost (28 percent) and class times (26 percent) close behind. Other reasons for not participating in adult education included class location (17 percent), lack of child care (15 percent), lack of information (15 percent), and no classes of interest (14 percent).

Goal 6: Safe, Disciplined, and Drug-Free Schools

By the year 2000, every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

Student Attitudes and Drug Use

- The use of alcohol and other drugs by twelfth-grade students has decreased. In 1980, 72 percent of the twelfth-graders reported that they had used alcohol in the past month; while in 1991, 54 percent of the twelfth-grade students reported use of alcohol and other drugs in the prior month.

- In 1992, the percentages of students disapproving of adults having five or more drinks in a row once or twice each weekend were 84 percent of eighth-grade students, 78 percent of tenth-grade students, and 71 percent of twelfth-grade students.

- The percentages of students reporting in 1992 that they had had five or more drinks in a row during the previous two weeks were 13 percent of eighth-grade students, 21 percent of tenth-grade students, and 28 percent of twelfth-grade students.

- In 1992, the percentages of students reporting marijuana use in the previous month were 7 percent of eighth-grade students, 15 percent of tenth-grade students, and 22 percent of twelfth-grade students; self-reported cocaine use was 2 percent of eighth- and tenth-graders and 3 percent of twelfth-grade students.

School Discipline and Security

- Of the high school teachers surveyed in 1991, 68 percent felt that they had substantial or complete disciplinary control over the students in their classroom, a slight increase from 67 percent in 1988.

- Between 1990 and 1992, there was a decrease in the number of twelfth-graders reporting that their property had been stolen.

Conclusion

The goods news found in this third annual *Goals Report, 1993* is a slight decline in student victimization and use of alcohol and other drugs among twelfth-graders and an increase in mathematics and science achievement. In other areas, however, the *Report* shows a stagnation or movement in the wrong direction, such as in the high school completion rate and adult literacy. Additionally, there are significant "achievement gaps" and differences in student, parental, and worker attitudes between our country and other industrialized nations.

Overall, the *Goals Report, 1993* continues to illuminate how far our nation is from reaching the Goals. A positive result of knowing about our nation's education problems, however, is that this awareness should further motivate and challenge us to institute the changes necessary to remain among the world's leaders in education. Educators and parents tolerance for mediocrity will be diminished and a commitment to education reform will be strengthened.

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